

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 COME-00 EB-08 INR-10 LAB-04  
NSAE-00 SIL-01 HA-05 TRSE-00 DODE-00 AID-05 PER-01  
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R 120522Z JUL 78  
FM USLO RIYADH  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 586  
INFO AMEMBASSY JIDDA  
AMCONSUL DHAHRAN

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EO 11652: NA  
TAGS: SHUM, ELAB, SA  
SUBJECT: SAUDI DECREE AGAINST WOMEN WORKING

REF: (A) RIYADH 397, (B) RIYADH 532

1. USLO OFFICERS MET WITH DEPUTY MINISTER OF LABOR MOHAMMAD AL FAEZ TO DISCUSS ENFORCEMENT OF THE DECREE AGAINST WOMEN WORKING. FAEZ, WHO IS RESPONSIBLE FOR ENFORCEMENT OF LABOR LAWS, HAD PREVIOUSLY TOLD USLO THAT HE HAD USED HIS PROSECUTORIAL DISCRETION TO OVERLOOK WIDESPREAD VIOLATION OF LABOR LAW REGULATIONS WITH RESPECT TO WOMEN: I.E., THE REQUIREMENT THAT WOMEN WORK SEPARATELY FROM MEN AND OUT OF SIGHT OF THE PUBLIC. FAEZ HAD SAID HE WAS CONCERNED ABOUT THE DETRIMENTAL IMPACT THAT STRICT ENFORCEMENT WOULD HAVE ON NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND THAT HE PERSONALLY FAVORED OUTRIGHT LEGALIZATION OF WOMEN WORKING. USLO HAD HOPED THAT FAEZ, WHO HAD JUST RETURNED FROM THE GENEVA ILO CONFERENCE, WOULD BE ABLE TO INFLUENCE THE LABOR MINISTRY'S ENFORCEMENT OF THE NEW DECREE. HOWEVER, FAEZ, WHO IS ONE OF THE KINGDOM'S FOREMOST LEGAL EXPERTS, MADE IT CLEAR THAT HE IS UNABLE TO

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MODERATE THE SITUATION. THE NEW DECREE IS LEGALLY NOT EVEN PART OF THE LABOR CODE. IT IS AN EXTRAORDINARY MEASURE IN WHICH THE LABOR MINISTRY HAS NO DISCRETION BUT, RATHER, IS MERELY A FUNCTIONARY SUBJECT TO INSTRUCTIONS FROM THE INTERIOR MINISTRY. ANY EXCEPTION OR MODIFICATION HAS TO COME FROM PRINCE NAIF HIMSELF. A JOINT COMMITTEE OF LABOR AND INTERIOR HAS BEEN

ESTABLISHED TO COORDINATE ENFORCEMENT.

3. LABOR MINISTRY AUTHORITY APPLIES ONLY TO PRIVATE COMPANIES. LABOR INSPECTORS HAVE NO AUTHORITY TO INSPECT PROPERTY OF ANY OTHER SAG AGENCUES, WHERE ENFORCEMENT IS THE PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE RESPECTIVE MINISTER. ACCORDING TO FAEZ, IF A MINISTER DO NOT COMPLY, HE HAD BETTER HAVE THE POLITICAL BACKING TO PROTECT HIMSELF IF HE IS CALLED TO ACCOUNT BY PRINCE NAIF. FAEZ DID ASSURE US THAT THE U.S. CORPS OF ENGINEERS AND JOINT ECONOMIC COMMISSION NEED NOT FEAR LABOR INSPECTORS BECAUSE THEY ARE BEYOND HIS JURISDICTION. THE ONE EXCEPTION WAS THE JEC VOCATIONAL TRAINING PROGRAM WHICH IS UNDER HIS PERSONAL SUPERVISION. COMMENT: THE STATUS OF SAG CONTRACTORS WITH FACILITIES OUTSIDE MINISTRY PROPERTY IS STILL AMBIGUOUS. SUCH FIRMS SHOULD SEEK CLARIFICATION FROM THEIR SPONSORING MINISTRY.

4. THE DEPUTY MINISTER SAID THAT PRESSURE HAD BEEN BUILDING ON THE ISSUE FOR SOME TIME AND COMMITMENT TO ENFORCING THE DECREE IS DEEP AND PERMANENT. HE SAID WESTERN FIRMS HAD ABUSED THE LATITUDE HE HAD GIVEN THEM, AND HAD NOT ONLY DISREGARDED REGULATIONS ABOUT BASIC WORKING CONDITIONS FOR WOMEN, BUT HAD DONE IT SO FLAGRANTLY THAT THE SAG NOW HAD TO ACT TO MAINTAIN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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CREDIBILITY WITH THE POPULATION. WOMEN WERE PUT IN PLACES VISIBLE TO THE GENERAL PUBLIC, OFTEN ATTIRED IN WAYS THAT WOULD NOT EVEN BE ACCEPTABLE IN U.S. OFFICES. AS A RESULT WOMEN ARE BANNED FROM WORKING ALTOGETHER, WITH CERTAIN NARROW EXCEPTIONS SUCH AS NURSES, TEACHERS AND SOCIAL WORKERS.

5. FAEZ SAID INSPECTIONS WOULD CONTINUE, BOTH ON A RANDOM BASIS AND IN RESPONSE TO COMPLAINTS. ALTHOUGH ENFORCEMENT WILL HURT SAUDI PROJECTS, HE CAN NO LONGER TAKE THAT INTO CONSIDERATION. FAEZ REITERATED THE PENALTIES ALREADY REPORTED AND ADDED THAT THE MINISTRY OF INTERIOR WAS CONSIDERING DEPORTING TOP MANAGEMENT OF FIRMS RESPONSIBLE FOR REPEATED VIOLATION OF THE DECREE.

6. COMMENT: THE TURNABOUT OF FAEZ WHO IS PERSONALLY SYMPATHETIC TO WOMEN WORKING, SUGGESTS THE DEPTH OF THE SAG'S COMMITMENT TO THE DECREE. HIS REMARKS SUGGEST THAT ONLY FIRMS WITH SPONSORS POWERFUL ENOUGH TO DEFY PRINCE NAIF WILL ESCAPE ENFORCEMENT.  
GRANINGER

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## Message Attributes

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**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
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**Draft Date:** 12 jul 1978  
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**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
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**TAGS:** SHUM, ELAB, SA  
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